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THE BIBLE and MODERN CRITICISM

LETTERS FROM
PROFESSOR HUXLEY, THE DUKE OF ARGYLL,
AND SIR ROBERT ANDERSON

Exhibiting Professor Huxley's retreat from a position
he maintained against the Right Hon. W. E. Gladstone
in the Nineteenth Century

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JANUARY—FEBRUARY, 1892

[*From The Times, January 5, 1892*]

THE BIBLE and MODERN CRITICISM

TO THE EDITOR OF THE TIMES

Sir,—Your correspondents on this subject are dealing with three distinct questions—(1) Whether the manifesto of the 38 clergymen is well timed; (2) whether the bases on which their conclusions rest are sound; and (3) whether these conclusions themselves are right. On the first question I do not presume to speak. Upon the second I wish to point out that the Church of England does not place "the Church" above the Bible as these clergymen do. Article xix. defines "the Church." Article xx. defines its powers, qualifying them thus: "And yet it is not lawful for the Church to ordain anything that is contrary to God's word written, neither may it expound one place of Scripture that it be repugnant to another. Wherefore, although the Church be a witness and a keeper of Holy Writ, yet, as it ought not to decree anything against the same, so," &c. Articles xxi. and xxxiv. speak in the same sense. Nor does Article vi. teach otherwise. As Lord Grimthorpe's second letter points out, it merely recites that the Church has always distinguished between the canonical and the apocryphal books, and then proceeds to specify them both. Nothing can thus be clearer than that the Church of England places the Bible above "the Church," and gives it an authority which is independent of the Church.

[From *The Times*, January 5, 1892]

It speaks of a fallible Church and an infallible Bible. It represents the Church as being to the Scripture what the High Court of Justice is to the statutes. The High Court does not make the law ; it is the law that makes the Court. The Court merely expounds and obeys the law ; and if " it expound one place that it be repugnant to another " there is happily an appellate tribunal by which it can be controlled. So by Articles xx. and xxxiv. the Church of England accords to " faithful men " an appeal to " God's word written," whenever the Church is found to be departing from that supreme standard of the truth.

And never surely was that appeal more needed than now. The manifesto of the 38 clergymen is a sad proof of the decline of Christianity in the Church of England. With them " the Church " is not merely " A witness and keeper " (as Article xx. avers) but " *The* witness and keeper of Holy Writ," and " the traditionary testimony of the Church " is declared to be the ground of our faith in Holy Writ. This is but one link removed from the teaching of " *Lux Mundi*," which they assail and repudiate. Mr. Gore would have us accept the Christian creed on the authority of the Church (p. 340). The manifesto gives us the Bible itself as the basis of our faith, but tells us that it is on the authority of the Church that we must accept the Bible. It is plain that the future of Christianity will be " a soldier's battle." Church dignitaries are powerful in attack but weak in defence.

May I go on to speak of the main question to which all this leads ? The " higher critics " are specialists and experts. Their place therefore is the witness-box. Or if specialists may ever be allowed a seat upon the judicial bench, it should be only as assessors. They make the worst judges possible. The judicial faculty is rarely developed in men who are habitually toiling over details. But these critics write and speak as though men like Lord Grimthorpe were not competent to master their facts and arguments,

[From *The Times*, January 5, 1892]

and more competent than they to adjudicate upon them. It is somewhat invidious to speak thus of the living; I will appeal, therefore, to three great lawyers not long gone from us. Lord Cairns, Lord Justice Lush, and Mr. Justice Archibald made no secret of their convictions on this subject. No strangers to the attacks of "higher criticism," they professed unfaltering faith in the Bible. And surely if we are to be led by men in such matters, most of us would be content to accept the decision of a court composed of these three great Judges.

I desire to add a personal statement, though I do so reluctantly and with diffidence. But I speak here as one of a class who may surely claim a hearing in this controversy. Taught in early life to regard the Bible as the inspired word of God, we soon came to feel the power of the destructive criticism so ripe in our own times. And faith gave way under the strain. The man who believes on human testimony that a virgin bore a child, and that a dead man came back to life, is a superstitious creature who would believe anything. The question at issue was between agnosticism and Christianity. We faced that question and thrashed it out in the light of all that the critics had to urge. Some of us, at least, have studied the Bible quite as diligently as the critics have done, and as the result, while wholly free from the trammels of "articles" or "creeds," we have come back to the faith of those who framed these formularies. We do not look upon the martyrs with patronizing pity as weak fools or fanatics. The faith they died for we deem worth living for; and if belief in the Bible led to the same consequences now as it did in dark days gone by, we trust we should not shrink from them. To ask *The Times* to publish the grounds of our faith would be an impertinence, but we are ready with our *apologia* if and whenever it is demanded of us.

I am, &c., R. ANDERSON.

39, Linden-gardens, W., January 4.

[From *The Times*, January 23, 1892]

TO THE EDITOR OF THE TIMES

Sir,—When the Fenians planned their raid on Canada no fears were felt for the stability of the Queen's government. But the long frontier line of the Dominion could not possibly be defended, and the safety of settlers all along the border was a cause of grave anxiety. It is now matter of history how Major Le Caron's work enabled us to avoid the peril, and the raid ended in a fizzle. This "Modern Criticism" controversy recalls to my mind these incidents. In the guerrilla war raging round the Bible the sacred volume lies open to attack all along the line. The result is not doubtful so far as the Bible itself is concerned, but the desultory wildness of these assaults makes them a danger to the faith of many. I trust, therefore, you will not close the correspondence without admitting a reply to the letter of "A Beneficed English Clergyman of 25 years' standing." I can append no such high-sounding signature to what I write, but as one who has some experience in arriving at conclusions by patient inquiry—more, it may be, in a twelvemonth than the "Beneficed Clergyman" would have in a quarter of a century—I claim your kind indulgence to grant me a further hearing.

As I mentioned in my former letter, I, too, began life as he did, with implicit faith in the Bible, or, rather, in what I was told the Bible taught. I, too, supposed that the world was created in 144 hours 6,000 years ago. On discovering the folly of such a belief I gave up the Bible story. But I did not stick in the quagmire which has swamped your correspondent. I came to find that not only did the Bible contain no such statement, but that the plain words of Genesis were inconsistent with "the traditional beliefs of my younger days." I cannot, of course, enlarge on this here. I have written on the subject, as have so many others who treat of it with an authority to which I make no pretensions.

Your correspondent quotes Mr. Huxley. May I give a typical instance of the way in which these

[*From The Times, January 23, 1892*]

great men mislead the public ? In his famous tournament with the Professor five years ago, Mr. Gladstone maintained that the Mosaic cosmogony was in harmony with the results of scientific research. But Mr. Huxley stormed that position by showing that reptiles "occur in the Permian strata," and therefore existed at a far earlier period than birds, whereas Moses assigns the origin of birds to the fifth period of creation, and that of "creeping things" to the sixth—"for, as is shown by Leviticus (ch. xi., 29-31), the Mosaic writer includes lizards among his 'creeping things.'" Such was Mr. Huxley's argument, and "the merest Sunday-school exegesis" was his own most apt description of it. For the fact is that the word used in Leviticus xi. (sheh'-retz) has no affinity with the word which occurs in the 24th, 25th, and 26th verses of Genesis i. (reh'-mes), but it is the identical word rendered "moving creature" in the 20th verse, which records the first appearance of animal life. The reptiles of Genesis i., 20, and Leviticus xi. were utterly "unclean"; the "creeping things" of Genesis i., 24-26, were expressly sanctioned for food (Genesis ix., 3). Science and Scripture are thus entirely in accord, but Mr. Huxley's "Sunday-school exegesis" is still before the public to upset the faith of "A Beneficed Clergyman" and others.

Your correspondent then speaks of the immoralities of the Bible. His gloss upon Numb. xxxi., 17-18, must recoil upon himself. The immorality is entirely in his own suggestion, which is an insult to the purest and best in all ages of the Church's history who have read the book with far different thoughts and have placed it without reserve in the hands of their children. The charge here made resolves itself into a question of opinion, and, therefore, the appeal I make to this "cloud of witnesses" is the only possible answer to it.

Then, as to "the cruelties" of the Bible—the destruction of the Canaanites, for example. We teach our children to forgive injuries, and to be loving and kind to all; and yet we relentlessly track and punish

[From *The Times*, January 23, 1892]

criminals. There is no real inconsistency between the practice and the teaching, and yet to the young child they seem utterly opposed. I need not point the parable. I cannot refrain from adding that to denounce the morality of Psalms, which the New Testament applies expressly to our Lord Jesus Christ, is a bold venture for a clergyman, even though he be beneficed and shelters himself by anonymity.

One word as to your correspondent "Hope" and his "Friend A." Their faith gave way on noticing the marked difference between the 39th and 40th chapters of Isaiah. It is a pity that no one was at hand to point out to them that chapters xxxvi. to xxxix. are but a fragment of contemporary history. Where is the contrast between chapter xl. and chapter xxxv. ? Between the prophetic portions of the book "higher criticism" can show no differences that may not be accounted for by the fact which the critics ignore—that at least half a century intervened between the prophet's earlier and later utterances (Is. i., 1).

Men are eager to convict the Bible of immorality or error on evidence of a kind which would not avail to convict a notorious thief of picking pockets. Any *ad captandum* statement is enough if only it be endorsed by someone who is better versed in Greek or Hebrew than his fellows, or has gained a reputation as a scientist. But learning is not scholarship, and something more even than scholarship is needed in the study of the Scriptures. There is a deeper language in the book which philology takes no account of, a language to be deciphered only by tracing the unnumbered strands in the twisted line of type and antitype, and promise and prophecy, which runs unbroken through it. But such a study is unsuited to the columns of *The Times*, as it is entirely ignored in the pages of the critics.

I am, &c., R. ANDERSON.

[From *The Times*, January 26, 1892]

TO THE EDITOR OF THE TIMES

Sir,—The point raised by Mr. Anderson in *The Times* of to-day was brought to my notice years ago ; and if I had been able to discover that it had anything to do with the main question at issue, I should have dealt with it at that time.

Mr. Gladstone's general contention was that the so-called "Mosaic" cosmogony has been confirmed by science ; and I had, more particularly, to meet his specific assertion that the order of the appearance of animals laid down in the first chapter of Genesis had "been so affirmed in our time by natural science that it may be taken as a demonstrated conclusion and established fact." It was agreed on both sides that, according to Genesis (i., 20-25), "creeping things and beasts of the earth" and "every thing that creepeth on the ground" appeared on the sixth day, while "winged fowl" had come into existence on the fifth day ; and it was not disputed that "winged fowl" included birds and "creeping things," reptiles. Consequently, if my assertion that according to natural science birds appeared on the earth after reptiles is correct (and it has not been challenged), it follows that the teachings of natural science, so far from affirming the order given in Genesis, diametrically contradict it.

I am sure Mr. Anderson cannot desire to "mislead the public" whatever it may be my misfortune to have done ; and therefore he will share my desire to get this matter clearly settled before we go into the subordinate, and, so far as the main issue is concerned, unimportant Levitical question. Does he admit the existence of the contradiction I have pointed out or does he not ? And if he does not admit it, will he be so good as to give his reasons for taking that course ?

I am, Sir, your obedient servant,

T. H. HUXLEY.

Eastbourne, January 24.

[*From The Times, February 1, 1892*]

TO THE EDITOR OF THE TIMES

Sir,—I appeal to your courtesy to allow me to meet Mr. Huxley's challenge. His criticisms, moreover, suggest that in my desire for brevity I failed in my former letter to make my meaning clear. May I then restate the point at issue?

In "The Dawn of Creation and Worship" Mr. Gladstone maintained that natural science confirms the truth of the Mosaic cosmogony. Mr. Huxley's reply to this I give in his own words:—

"It is agreed on all hands" (he wrote) "that terrestrial lizards and other reptiles allied to lizards occur in the Permian strata. It is further agreed that the Triassic strata were deposited after these. Moreover, it is well known that, even if certain foot-prints are to be taken as unquestionable evidence of the existence of birds, they are not known to occur in rocks earlier than the Trias, while indubitable remains of birds are to be met with only much later. Hence it follows that natural science does not 'affirm' the statement that birds were made on the fifth day, and 'everything that creepeth on the ground' on the sixth, on which Mr. Gladstone rests his order; for, as is shown by Leviticus, the 'Mosaic writer' includes lizards among his 'creeping things'."

The passage Mr. Huxley quoted was Leviticus xi. 29-31, and his comment on it was that "the merest Sunday-school exegesis, therefore, suffices to prove that when the Mosaic writer in Genesis i., 24, speaks of creeping things he means to include lizards among them."

This same argument is summarized in still terser and more unequivocal language in his letter of January 24.

My rejoinder to all this is that the entire argument rests on no better foundation than the chance use of the expression "creeping things" in our English Bible, whereas, in fact, that term represents two wholly distinct words in the original Hebrew. One of these words (*reh'-mes*) is never used in the Bible

[From *The Times*, February 1, 1892]

to denote reptiles, and in Genesis ix., 3, it indicates the animals assigned to man for food. The other word (sheh'-retz) expressly includes reptiles in the passage in Leviticus which Mr. Huxley quotes, and is used throughout that chapter and elsewhere to denote unclean "creeping things." But it is the former word (reh'-mes) which is used in Genesis i., 24, 25, 26, which specify the results of the sixth period of creation, whereas the latter word (sheh'-retz) occurs in the 20th verse, which records the first appearance of animal life upon the earth.

I unequivocally deny, therefore, that according to Moses the reptiles came into existence at a later period than the birds, or that there is here any contradiction between the teaching of natural science and "the order given in Genesis." And if anyone should now fall back on the plea that though birds are named after reptiles in the cosmogony, they nevertheless belonged to the same "day" of creation, and were therefore contemporaneous, I would venture with all due respect to reply in anticipation that this is but a further instance of "the merest Sunday-school exegesis."

Mr. Huxley says the point I have raised "was brought to his notice years ago." Possibly I can account for this. I put it forward in 1889 in the Christian chapter of a work entitled "A Doubter's Doubts about Science and Religion"—a book which attracted attention mainly on account of a very appreciative letter from Mr. Gladstone to the anonymous author, which went the round of the newspapers. Since then it has been before the public unchallenged, and the argument it refutes remains still unrecalled. I do not, of course, pretend that I have here established the truth of the Mosaic cosmogony. As Mr. Huxley himself has rightly said, "It is vain to discuss a supposed coincidence between Genesis and science, unless we have first settled on the one hand what Genesis says, and on the other hand what science says." Science has not yet spoken her last word upon

[*From The Times, February 1, 1892*]

this subject ; and while the superficial and the sceptic take for granted that " what Genesis says " is known to all, a deeper knowledge and closer study of the sacred page will make us hesitate to dogmatize as to its meaning. But I claim to have answered Mr. Huxley's main attack upon the cosmogony, an attack which has disturbed the faith of many and confirmed the unbelief of thousands.

I am, yours, &c.,

R. ANDERSON.

[*From The Times, February 3, 1892*]

TO THE EDITOR OF THE TIMES

Sir,—While desirous to waste neither your space nor my own time upon mere misrepresentations of what I have said elsewhere about the relations between modern science and the so-called " Mosaio " cosmogony, it seems needful that I should ask for the opportunity of stating the case once more, as briefly and fairly as I can.

I conceive the first chapter of Genesis to teach—(1) that the species of plants and animals owe their origin to supernatural acts of creation ; (2) that these acts took place at such times and in such a manner that all the plants were created first, all the aquatic and aerial animals (notably birds) next, and all terrestrial animals last. I am not aware that any Hebrew scholar denies that these propositions agree with the natural sense of the text. Sixty years ago I was taught, as most people were then taught, that they are guaranteed by Divine authority.

On the other hand, in my judgment, natural science teaches no less distinctly—(1) that the species of animals and plants have originated by a process of natural evolution ; (2) that this process has taken place in such a manner that the species of animals and plants respectively have come into existence one

[*From The Times, February 3, 1892*]

after another throughout the whole period since they began to exist on the earth; that the species of plants and animals known to us are, as a whole, neither older, nor younger, the one than the other.

The same holds good of aquatic and aerial species, as a whole, compared with terrestrial species; but birds appear in the geological record later than terrestrial reptiles, and there is every reason to believe that they were evolved from the latter.

Until it is shown that the first two propositions are not contained in the first chapter of Genesis, and that the second pair are not justified by the present condition of our knowledge, I must continue to maintain that natural science and the "Mosaic" account of the origin of animals and plants are in irreconcilable antagonism.

As I greatly desire that this broad issue should not be obscured by the discussion of minor points, I propose to defer what I may have to say about the great "shehretz" and "rehmes" question till to-morrow.

I am, Sir, your obedient servant,
T. H. HUXLEY.

Eastbourne, February 1.

[*From The Times, February 8, 1892*]

TO THE EDITOR OF THE TIMES

Sir,—In Professor Huxley's letter in your issue of yesterday he completely shifts his ground. He now asserts that Genesis ascribes creation to acts which he calls "supernatural," whereas, he urges, science asserts that it originated in a "process of natural evolution."

This antithesis is absolutely unknown to the literature both of the Old Testament and the New. It is equally unknown to science and also to philosophy. The Bible knows nothing of what men now

[From *The Times*, February 8, 1892]

call "the supernatural." It regards all "natural processes" as the work of a Divine Being. Professor Huxley asserts or implies that this is erroneous, and that wherever we can trace the operation of natural causes we must exclude all idea of a Divine origin or direction.

I venture to assert, on the contrary, that this is very bad science and still worse philosophy. Physical science has nothing to do with anything else than "processes" and physical causes. When it pretends to deny the derivation from or the direction of these by a Supreme Mind it goes outside its province. It does more. It contradicts the universal testimony and consciousness of mankind as evinced in the very structure of all human speech. Professor Huxley himself, in spite of a continuous effort, has vainly tried to eliminate the language of design, of purpose, and of adaptation from his description of biological structures and functions.

The sacred writers have dealt with this aspect of nature almost exclusively. But they have never even tried to eliminate the idea of physical processes. Both are to them equally "natural." The vicious and unphilosophical distinction between "natural" and "supernatural" is absolutely unknown to them.

I venture to think that this is true science and the soundest philosophy. But it is well that the "broad issue" for which Professor Huxley seems to contend should be thus openly avowed. That "broad issue," as now explained, appears to be this, that in ascribing the creative work to a Divine Being the narrative of Genesis is in "irreconcilable antagonism" with modern science. I am happy to believe, and to know, that in this broad issue he will not have the unanimous or even the general support of the most eminent men of science in the United Kingdom.

Your obedient servant,

ARGYLL.

February 4.

[From The Times, February 4, 1892]

TO THE EDITOR OF THE TIMES

Sir,—I beg leave to assure my courteous critic, Canon Girdlestone, that . . .

Mr. Anderson, on the contrary, broadly affirms that “‘reh-mes’ is never used in the Bible to denote reptiles.” But he produces no evidence in proof of this somewhat rash assertion. The fact that Genesis ix., 3, sanctions the use of “reh-mes” for food proves nothing more than that the writer of the passage considered that Noah and his family were not bound by all the obligations of the Levitical law.

It would be more to the purpose if Mr. Anderson could produce an example of any Levitically clean animal to which the term “reh-mes” is applied. Still better if he would undertake to prove that when, in the first book of Kings, the wisdom of Solomon is celebrated, and he is said to have spoken of “reh-mes” (creeping things, R.V.), this term includes none but animals which, according to the Levitical law, might be eaten. Further, if the “reh-mes” (R.V., creeping things) which came out of the Ark were all Levitically clean animals, will Mr. Anderson be so good as to tell us under what head we are to range the swarm of pairs of terrestrial reptiles and other land “sheh-retz” which certainly must have been saved in that capacious vessel?

Mr. Anderson speaks with fondness of a peculiar exegesis “which philology takes no account of” and which, in return, I suppose takes no account of philology and as little of science. It may be that he has reached his surprising conclusions by the help of this *organon*; but I do not think that he will get persons who “take account” of either philology, science, or common sense to follow him.

For the present, then, Sir, I stand by my poor Sunday-school exegesis. I hold that “reh-mes” covers the same land animals as those denoted by “sheh-retz,” and that my argument from Leviticus, though superfluous, is valid. With many regrets for

[From *The Times*, February 4, 1892]

having been obliged to trouble you at this length about objections which, in my judgment, have no importance,

I am, Sir, your obedient servant,

T. H. HUXLEY.

Eastbourne, February 2.

[From *The Times*, February 8, 1892]

TO THE EDITOR OF THE TIMES

Sir,— My rejoinder to Mr. Huxley shall be brief. Anyone who will be at the pains to turn to his *Nineteenth Century* articles will see that "his argument from Leviticus," instead of being, as he now pleads, "incidental" and "superfluous," was vital to his attack upon Mr. Gladstone's position. Upon it depended the only allegation of fact, as contrasted with theory, in his indictment of the Mosaic cosmogony. According to science reptiles existed before birds, but according to Genesis birds existed before reptiles, so he asserted. And the ground of his assertion was that, while birds belong to the fifth period of creation, "creeping things" belong to the sixth, and that "creeping things" are defined by "the Mosaic writer" himself in Leviticus xi. to include reptiles.

Now that this is proved to be merely an *ad captandum* appeal to the phraseology of the English Bible, Mr. Huxley takes refuge in the plea that the word used in Genesis i., 24, may include reptiles. But this, even if true, will not help him. The fact remains that the word in Leviticus xi. is wholly different from the word used in Genesis i., 24, whereas the validity of his argument depends on its identity with it. And the argument is his, not mine. He it is who insists that Genesis i. must be interpreted by

[*From The Times, February 8, 1892*]

Leviticus xi., and adopting his canon of interpretation I have shown that he is "hoist with his own petard."

It is on petty points of this sort that the conventional attacks upon the Bible rest. But the foundations of faith are of a very different character. If facts be adduced to prove the Bible false, I shall give it up and cease to be a Christian. But practical men and men of common sense care little for mere theories. In common with so many other Christians I regard the Darwinian theory of evolution as being, within strictly defined limits, a reasonable hypothesis. But the peculiar biological theories with which Mr Huxley's name is prominently identified are in a different category. I am old enough to remember the time when they first gained currency in England; I am young enough to be warranted in hoping I may outlive their popularity. But these unproved, and possibly ephemeral, theories of the hour, dignified by the title of "natural science," are put forward as the grounds on which the book of all the ages is to be rejected.

Nor am I abashed at incurring Mr. Huxley's contempt for the statement I made that the Scriptures are, as Lord Bacon phrased it, "of the nature of their author" and have a deep spiritual meaning and a "hidden harmony" far beneath the surface strata in which the critics ply their tools. But at this point, as in my former letters, I check myself. Attacks upon the Bible are a fit subject for discussion anywhere; but the moment the Christian turns to the great spiritual realities on which faith rests, the controversy becomes too distinctly religious for the columns of a newspaper. It only remains for me to thank you most cordially for permitting me to go so far in this direction as I have done, and to apologize for having trespassed so largely on your space.

I am, Sir, your obedient servant,

R. ANDERSON.

39, Linden-gardens, W., February 5.

[*From The Times, February 11, 1892*]

TO THE EDITOR OF THE TIMES

Sir,—I do not think that your readers can reasonably be expected to take a perennial interest in "sheh-retz" and "reh-mes"; and for my part, I am quite content to leave what I have said about them to the judgment of competent Hebrew scholars who possess some little tincture of zoological knowledge.

But there are certain broader aspects of the problem . . .

I am, Sir, your obedient servant,

T. H. HUXLEY.

Eastbourne, February 8.

NOTE.

To the one who caused this reprint to be issued the Spirit of Disbelief appears to act upon the principle that while the utterances of men should receive courteous attention what is found in the Scriptures must be met by continuous querying, but by querying only, because were one to allege any specific statement to be untrue proof might be called for, and as such proof can never be given the one making the allegation would look foolish and so injure his efficiency in furthering the great bluff of disbelief.

Professor Huxley's attempt to prove untrue a specific statement of Scripture, as disclosed by this correspondence, appears to have been the last and only such public attempt made within present human memory.

